

Plum Creek Timber Company White Paper

Plum Creek Timber Company Higher and Better Use Lands and Implications for Native Fish Conservation

Overview

Higher and Better Use (HBU) lands are lands owned by Plum Creek that might have a higher value for a use other than timber harvest. HBU lands may be valuable for recreation or conservation.

Plum Creek has committed to arranging for the conservation of HBU lands. These commitments are included in the Plum Creek Native Fish Habitat Conservation Plan (NFHCP).

Key Points

The purpose of this white paper is as follows:

- Identify the lands classified as HBU
- List the sales completed to date
- Evaluate the impact these lands have on bull trout
- Outline approaches for mitigating potential adverse impacts

In 1993, Plum Creek reviewed lands in the Rocky Mountain Region ownership to identify potential HBU properties.

Approximately 7 percent of the lands in this region were identified as HBU lands (110,000 acres in 34 study areas). All of the HBU lands are located in Montana.

Approximately two-thirds of the HBU areas are located in the Thompson River Basin and the Fisher River Basin. Additional lands may be identified as HBU in the future.

Supporting Technical Information

In 1996, Plum Creek initiated a program to sell or exchange HBU lands in the Rocky Mountain Region. As of January 1999, approximately 22,000 acres of land have been offered for sale and 19,150 acres have been sold. The following groups have purchased HBU lands:

- **Public:** 73 percent (13,940 acres) to Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, and the U.S. Forest Service
- **Conservation Buyers:** 13 percent (2,438 acres)
- **Developers:** 10 percent (1,932 acres)
- **Adjacent Landowners:** 5 percent (840 acres)

The largest sale was to the Nature Conservancy for 11,730 acres, which will eventually be transferred to the BLM (included in public total). This sale includes 10 miles along the Blackfoot River. Plum Creek has several other pending projects to exchange or sell HBU land.

Bull Trout and HBU

Seventy percent (77,000 acres) of the HBU lands are located within watersheds important to bull trout. Of these lands, 92 percent are located within the Thompson and Fisher River Basins.

The HBU land that is most important for bull trout is within river floodplains. HBU lands border an estimated 74 miles of streams designated as "key migratory rivers" for bull trout in the NFHCP.

Existing Regulations in Montana

Several state and county regulations apply to the sale, exchange, and use of property. These laws must be followed as Plum Creek seeks buyers for HBU land. The applicable laws are listed in detail for the HBU lands identified in this white paper.

Threats to Bull Trout

Scientists have identified several threats to bull trout. In response, various state and local regulations provide significant conservation for riparian areas. However, some concerns about impacts to bull trout on HBU lands are not directly addressed. These concerns include the following:

- How many trees and how much natural vegetation to leave around the floodplain
- Standards for road location and construction
- Controls for use of toxic materials such as pesticides and insecticides
- Control of animal waste
- Standards to limit impervious surface areas
- Control of private pond development

These concerns are addressed by conservation measures developed by Plum Creek.

Conclusion and Implications

Plum Creek committed to three conservation measures in the Land Use Planning section of the NFCHP:

- Land Use Principles
- Conservation Buyers
- Land Use Plan

Plum Creek adopted the **Land Use Principles** in 1995. These principles guide the planning, sale, and exchange of HBU lands. Plum Creek often seeks **Conservation Buyers** for HBU land, and has developed working relationships with conservation groups. Finally, Plum Creek has prepared a **Land Use Plan** for lands in key bull trout migratory corridors. The plan focuses on potential impacts within the floodplain, and addresses requirements for each of the concerns listed in the *Threats to Bull Trout* section of this summary.